

SIX ADDRESSES,
THEOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS,

DELIVERED BY

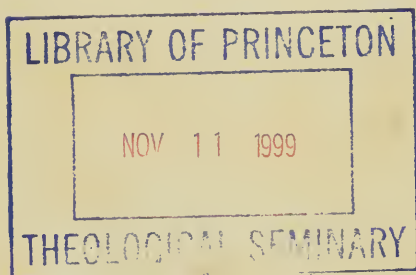
THE LATE

DR. P. C. VINTCENT,

MINISTER OF THE FREE PROTESTANT CHURCH, GRAAFF-REINET.

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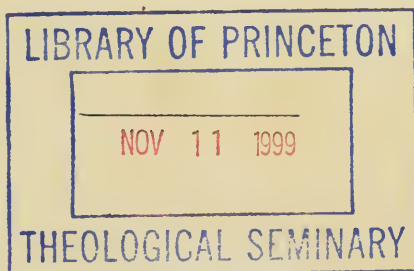
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I.

I.

ROMANS XIV: 3.

“LET NOT HIM THAT EATETH, DESPISE HIM THAT EATETH NOT; AND LET NOT HIM WHICH EATETH NOT, JUDGE HIM THAT EATETH.”

ONE of the most grievous errors which poisons religious life, is that mistaken notion—so prevalent even at the present time—which confuses *religion* and *doctrine*.

If you ask the Christian, what is the Christian religion? the Roman Catholic points to his catechism, and the Protestant to the confession of his particular church. Christianity also, the purest manifestation of man's religious sentiment, is thought to consist in doctrines.

This view—besides being entirely erroneous—is fraught with the most serious consequences to religion.

It encourages a mechanical kind of existence, so detrimental to the fresh vigorous life which ought to characterize the religious man.

It also calls into action that intolerant and persecuting spirit so subversive of all principles of brotherly love, of all true humane feeling, which has so sadly stained the history of man's religious progress; and which even now at times envelops the earth in a robe of mourning.

To the question, what is religion? the answer generally given is “worship of God.” Men thereby understand the outward form of worship. If this be the true definition, then the bond of union existing among the different branches of the great human family, which

we acknowledge in the universality of religion, does in reality not exist—belief in it then proves to be a *delusion*. For how diverging, conflicting and contradictory are the *forms* of worship! These forms very often exclude and condemn each other.

But we take a nobler and also, I think, more correct view of religion when we define it to be the sense of dependence upon a Higher Being, which is innate in man's nature. This innate sense forces man to form a conception of that unknown, yet strongly felt Power. The purity of this conception will, of course, be proportionate to the mental capacity and enlightenment of each individual. And these different conceptions—different they naturally must be, for the nations of the globe are in so many very different stages of mental development—regulate the outward worship. Hence the great variety and difference in this respect. So for instance the worship of the Hindoo, whose God is embodied in the mighty phenomena of nature, is of one kind; of another is that of the Greek who represents the Deity in the form of idealised man; of another type again is that of the Israelite whose representation of the Supreme Being is that of a Judge and King; of another also is that of the Christian who has risen to the conception of an Almighty Father. Underlying these many different forms there is one common feeling: man's innate religious sense.

Religious worship is but the *expression* of this *inward sense*; and its character is regulated by the degree of intellectual light enjoyed. The inward sense working in man leads him to certain convictions regarding the Deity, man, and the relation of man to God, and leads him also to adopt an outward form of worship in which he expresses the obligations resting upon him in consequence of the relations in which he stands to God.

It follows that while general advancement ennobles this inward sense—by developing and so strengthening it—it entirely changes the forms and doctrines, setting aside

antiquated ones as erroneous and framing new ones to fulfil the requirements of the particular period, until these again are replaced by others.

There is consequently a great difference between religion and doctrine. The one is founded upon an *innate feeling*; the other is the result of thought. But is there no connection between religion and doctrine? Most decidedly, a very close connection. We see this in the highest manifestation of religion—the one most void of doctrines—namely the religion of Jesus: “love to God.” Even this has its dogma—indispensable to its existence—the dogma namely that God exists and that He is Love. If the mind lacks the firm conviction of God’s existence and of His love, love on the part of man for that Being—whose existence he doubts or denies—is clearly an impossibility. But however intimate the connection may be, dogmas can never supersede religion. Not intellectual convictions but the disposition of the soul is religion. Doctrines have not called forth religion; on the contrary religion has called into existence doctrines. Religion is older and more than doctrine.

This is true of religion in general, it is consequently also true of Christianity in particular. And of this I wish more particularly to speak.

The conception which we—as Christians—hold of the Supreme Being is that of a Spirit omniscient and omnipresent, displaying in all His dealing perfect wisdom and actuated by love to man, who knowing our inmost thoughts can only delight in reciprocal love. Now this dogma, which we profess to believe,—whether all believe it in reality or are able to grasp its truth, is another question,—this dogma itself makes it evident that it is impossible to substitute doctrine for religion. For since God is a spirit, seeing into the very recesses of the soul, we cannot believe that we can please Him by a mere outward observance of certain forms and ceremonies; and since He is our Father, we cannot possibly think that

we can please Him by merely professing certain views regarding His person and His work. This belief calls us to a life of true religion, to a worship,—let us retain this term,—in “spirit and in truth”; to uprightness of heart and integrity of life, in other words to piety and Godliness.

Thus this very dogma—which must be acknowledged by all sects to be the fundamental doctrine of Christianity—condemns that erroneous notion which would confound doctrine with religion.

And yet Christians do confuse the two. Both Roman Catholics and Protestants point to their formal array of doctrines as being the Christian religion; both insist upon their being accepted as indispensable to salvation. But both, too, are not wanting in proofs of the baneful results of this error. Dogma causes stagnation of religious life; leads to a cold formalism which deadens the life of the soul, to a worship of the letter which killeth the spirit; it calls forth base hypocrisy and blasphemous mockery with regard to that which most closely concerns man’s eternal welfare. It is unnecessary further to enlarge upon this; we have opportunities in abundance to convince us of its truth; we see its sad proofs in men around us; we, alas, detect it in ourselves. Attaching an undue importance to doctrines, leads in the end to their being substituted for the religion of the soul.

This error is also the root of intolerance. For every church esteems its particular creeds to be Christianity, and therefore believes itself called upon to exterminate all error, and consequently also believes that it is labouring for the furtherance of religion and the cause of God, by condemning as erring, and persecuting as enemies to truth and religion, all those who differ from it.

Such being the fruits of this idea, it must necessarily be an erroneous one. And how allimportant to awaken man to the knowledge of this error, even if it was but to lessen the bitter theological hatred and intolerant

persecution it engenders ! But it does more, it also brings man nearer unto his Maker by dispersing those clouds which hide Him from view, and by purifying the sanctuary of the soul, where He reveals himself.

Turning to history we find every epoch which marks a striking progress in religious life is characterized by an opposition to, and an overthrow of, established doctrines.

The object, in fact, of every religious reformation is to extricate men from the network of doctrine, in which religion is in danger of being stifled ; to simplify it, and thus to place man in closer relation with God. Such was the case with Jesus. Did he not withstand the Pharisees who made the commandments of God of no effect by their "traditions" ? Did he not bring back religion from the snare of precepts in which it was being lost, to its proper sphere, the disposition of the soul, when he said : "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man" ? Did he not condemn the entire system of Phariseeism when he declared the whole law and the prophets to be : love to God and the neighbour ? Did he not break down the old temple with its mosaic institutions and erect a new one in the heart of man in which God was to be served in spirit and in truth ?

So also Paul. Did he not, in imitation of his great Master, labour to free Christianity from Jewish customs and heathen prejudices ? Was not this his preaching against bigoted Jews and superstitious heathen : "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" ?

And the reformation of Luther, was not that also a protest against the multitude of doctrines which had entirely superseded religion ? Did it not originate in the revolt of the religious feeling against the abuses which were countenanced in the name of religion ? Was not its purpose to place man in direct communion with God through the influence of the religion of the soul ?

And the aim of the reformation which is being brought about at the present time is the same. Is not the war declared by so-called liberalism against orthodoxy the same as that carried on by Jesus, by Paul, by Luther? Is it not to free the principles of Christianity from the entangling meshes of doctrines with which they have been interwoven by former generations? Is it not the cry of man's religious nature for its God and Father, a protest against the abuses of the Churches which strove for uniformity of creed while they disregard spirituality of life? Every earnest inquirer who has watched the present movement with unbiassed mind must admit that such is the case.

Great, and also deeply felt, is the necessity for such a change. Its importance to the welfare of man, ought to make us zealous labourers in this work of religious reform.

But—why deny it?—there are many and great difficulties to be overcome. Fierce is the opposition of those who, blinded by self-interest or prejudice, try to obstruct this movement as being a work of the evil one; their opposition is vehement, bitter, and often unscrupulous in the means which it employs. From another quarter the cry of pain and distress is raised against us, the destroyers of the peace of mind, of many simple-minded believers who are weak in faith. They, attached as they are to the traditionary views of their church, resting their weak faith on its rites and sacraments, happy in the belief of their fathers, quake before the advance of knowledge; for it threatens to subvert the very foundations of their faith. Verily the wheels of the chariot of Progress crush to death many a one who is weak and unstable!

It is sad but true, true and yet unavoidable, for we dare not stop its way without being false to our sacred trust.

This opposition is called forth by force of circumstances. Intellectual advancement makes man more critical in the examinations of the foundations of his faith

and of the forms of his worship. This critical enquiry has led many to see the fallacy of notions in former times generally received, and to value forms at their proper value as mere passing expressions of holy sentiments. It has led them to distinguish between religion itself and its *historical form*; to value the former as dwelling in the soul, and ever remaining though ever becoming purer and stronger; and the latter as the ever changing and temporary form.

Others however, unable to keep pace with intellectual progress, unable to free their minds from the trammels of prejudice, unable to rise above their traditionary beliefs, are sorely distressed at the havoc which criticism makes in their creeds; every blow to their doctrines is, in their eyes, a blow to religion itself; their doctrines are threatened, and in their estimation Christianity is being overthrown and religion itself undermined. Forms are attacked, and they cry aloud that the *substance* is in danger, because they have not yet learned to see the material difference between the two.

The "strong and the weak in faith," these are the two parties which stand opposed to each other in the present time. They are also conspicuous in all those periods of history which are characterized by particularly active religious progress,—such as that of the birth of Christianity, and that of the Reformation in the sixteenth century.

These opposing parties will always continue to exist, in theology as well as in politics. Nor is it necessary that they should disappear; but it is of the utmost importance that the different partisans should regard each other in such a spirit as is in accordance with the proper relation in which the two parties ought to stand to each other, that is to say, they must acknowledge that both have been ordained and placed next to each other by God, for mutual benefit and the furtherance of truth.

While I endeavour, by glancing at those two great historical epochs and at some circumstances of the present

day, to sketch the true nature of the two parties, let us take to heart the admonition of our text in which Paul exhorts us to *mutual forbearance*: "Let not him that eateth, despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not, judge him that eateth: for God hath received him."

The expression "strong in faith and weak in faith" is first met with in the Epistles of Paul.

In the Christian community at Rome there were some who had conscientious scruples concerning the use of certain kinds of meat, and who were very scrupulous in the observance of certain days as feast or fast days. "One"—who is strong in faith—"believeth that he may eat all things, another, who is weak, eateth herbs"; "One"—who is weak in faith—"esteemeth one day above another,"—he who is strong—"esteemeth every day alike."

These "weak in faith" were most likely Jewish converts who could not yet break with the Mosaic Law concerning "clean" and "unclean" animals, and concerning appointed "holy days"; while over against these were those who were not restrained by such prejudices.

The same phenomenon is to be observed in the Christian community at Corinth.

There some had serious conscientious scruples about eating meat which had first been offered to idols and was afterwards sold in the shambles; they feared that thereby they would be participators in those evil deeds of idolatry and also bring punishment upon themselves. Paul writing to these "weak brethren," enunciates the principles of the "strong" when he says, 1 Cor. viii: 8:—"Meat commendeth us not to God; for neither if we eat are we the better; neither if we eat not are we the worse," and 1 Cor. x: 25:—"Whatsoever is sold in the shambles that eat, asking no questions for conscience sake."

The "weak in faith" are consequently those "who believe that *things eternal*, which can have no connection with the inward disposition of the soul, commend man to God, that they form an essential part of religion, and are necessary to salvation."

The "strong" on the contrary are they who believe religion to be the *inward spiritual connection* between the soul and God, the universal Spirit, who believe Christianity to be "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Before Paul's time these two parties had already existed.

Jesus, when he declared against the punctilious Pharisees, when he transgressed their precepts and traditions, when he annulled all their sacrifices and rites by his simple worship in spirit and in truth, was strictly imitated by Paul when he vindicated the liberty and spirituality of the Christian religion against the bigoted and superstitious Jewish and heathen converts.

So also in later centuries the parties stand arrayed against each other; at the time of the German Reformation, the Protestants against Rome, and later still the different Protestant churches against each other.

Luther was "strong in faith" compared with Rome, for he again spiritualized religion; he substituted for the numerous "good works," church rites, and intercession between God and man, *Faith*; he substituted for external things the internal disposition which alone justifieth.

But Luther proved himself "weak in faith" as compared with Zwingle, when on account of doctrinal difference regarding the sacrament he refused to extend to him the hand of fellowship, and maintained that the acceptance of the doctrine as preached by him was necessary to salvation.

In our day these two parties are still each other's antagonists, but the feeling of enmity is entertained only by the one.

The Protestants soon after the Reformation became untrue to the simple and original doctrine of salvation by *faith*, as taught both by Paul and by Luther. The conduct of Luther on the occasion to which I have just referred proves that the Reformers themselves set their followers the example.

Religion was soon again identified with belief in certain *doctrines*, for instance in faith in vicarious atonement, etc., and with certain *outward observances*, the sacraments. Salvation was made dependent upon these. Therefore it became of the most vital importance that the source whence they were derived should be true beyond a doubt. The book consequently on which these doctrines rested, the Bible with all its varied contents, was raised to an *infallible authority*, it was the rule of faith, the word of God. Henceforth belief in the Bible, and also in the Church doctrines which were represented to be in accordance with that Book, became *religion* itself. In the opinion of the "weak in faith" to attack the Bible was to assail religion.

At the end of the eighteenth century the light of a new day dawned, a day of light, life and love. Religious life had awakened, and religion was again to be dislodged from the musty pages of a Book, from intricate ecclesiastical creeds, and to be harboured in the *soul*. The direct road to God through the communion of the spirit was again to be opened.

The so-called *foundation* of religion was examined and weighed and found wanting. Men had again learned to see that *religion* and *history* are two very different things; that piety and salvation cannot depend upon the acceptance of historical truths or untruths; "whether I believe that a certain book of the Bible was written in a particular time and by one particular person, does not make me better or worse; whether I believe that the world was created in six days or in a million years; that the Israelites passed through or along the Red Sea;

whether I believe that Jesus arose bodily out of the grave or not, this cannot make me better or worse." These questions were referred to historical criticism for its verdict, without prejudice or fear, and whatever that verdict was it could in no way hurt religion, for these questions pertain to *history* and not to religion.

This movement is carried on by the so-called liberals and moderns of the present day ; they are the " strong in faith " who believe that the kingdom of God is not meat and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the spirit.

At all times the opposing party has fought with *bitter animosity* and *persecuting intolerance*. This naturally follows from the nature of the case, for that which to them is most sacred territory is invaded and desecrated. They generally have recourse to violence. The Founder of Christianity was killed, Luther excommunicated, and at present we are denounced as *innovators*, *enemies to religion*. The believers in the old theology cry out : Men deprive us of the holy word of God, of the Gospel, of our Saviour, of all comfort and joy in life and death !

Let us hope that this cry—this false cry of alarm—is raised in real sincerity as the utterance of sorrow and anguish, and not from sinister motives merely to stir up others against us.

We thus see that these two parties ever reappear in times of religious and theological advancement. It is always the same struggle which repeats itself: the " strong against the weak."

What then are the benefits reformations confer upon man ? Has each new reformation again to start from the same point where the one which preceded it began ? Is there a constant backsliding to the same level after each change ? Is there a sudden rising and then again a sure falling to the same depth as before ? No, for then in reality there would be no progress. There is, alas ! a great falling off after each appearance of a great man,

but not to the former depth; he has raised the *general level*; the low after him stand higher than the low before his appearance.

So the position of the "strong and weak" remains the same, but only in relation to each other, not in reality. The "weak" always remain in the rear but the rear moves along with the whole body. The "strong" ever become "stronger" so also the "weak" ever less weak, but they remain "weak" compared with the strong who are continually increasing in strength.

The "weak" of the present stand as high as "the strong" of the past.

In the days of Paul the "weak" scrupled to eat meat offered to idols, in the time of Luther the "weak" no longer suffered from that weakness. After the Reformation the "strong" had outgrown the errors of Rome, but they still held firmly to the most strict theory of the *verbal infallibility* of the Bible. Even those called "weak" at present, no longer believe this.

The "weak" remain true to themselves in all generations in this, that they cling most tenaciously to whatever is delivered to them by the fathers, but they cannot prevent those traditions being discredited when advanced intellectual light proves them to be erroneous. The "weak" flatter themselves that they are the guardians of the same truths in which of old their fathers believed; but this is an illusion. The orthodox of to-day, for they are the "weak," would have been anathematized by the orthodox of a few centuries back.

So the world moves on, and men are carried along, often in spite of themselves.

"Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not, judge him that eateth."

Though we have not to combat the same prejudices against which Paul warred, there are still in our times

many erroneous views, which we know to be erroneous, and which, besides being erroneous are detrimental to true religious life and the furtherance of Christianity—against these we are called to raise our voice.

In spite of the many proofs to the contrary, is the belief in the authority of the Bible as the sole foundation of faith not very prevalent still? Does this belief not lead to an idolatrous use of that Book, and must not this have an injurious effect upon the spiritual life? Is there not a superstitious regard for doctrines, which cannot even stand the test of strict enquiry, and are they not made the test of a man's religiousness? Is doctrine not often preached as necessary to salvation and consequently as being religion itself? And are the pernicious consequences of this principle not felt in our day? Does it not result in *cold formalism* and in *bitter intolerance*?

We labour in the cause of truth, but do we not also labour to promote the Christian religion when we war against these errors?

Let us then do it without fear of the opposition. Let us not be kept back by exaggerated fear of giving offence. I know it is said by many that "critical examination of the Scriptures and the pursuit of science, whose results are at variance with traditionary views, are fraught with danger to the faith of the weak brethren." This is so, but it is also *life* unto many and is besides the *truth*; and we cannot but gain by having the truth. Men often seek to excuse themselves by saying, that the truth will eventually conquer falsehood, and that time will bring about the desired changes. True, we must have implicit faith in truth else we are cowardly soldiers; and we must trust in the future, else we lack the animating hope of success. But let us never forget that truth requires friends, *preachers* and *prophets*, and that without these it will always remain hidden and unknown; and let us remember also that the age requires its leaders.

And truly has it been said that "offences must come," although the lot of that prophet who bringeth it may not be enviable.

If God has blessed us with greater insight into his truth let us publish it to our fellow-men, *outspoken*, but in *kindness* and *love*, knowing and believing that we are furthering also *their welfare* and *happiness*; ever *firm* and *bold*, but with *forbearance*, mindful of the exhortation of Paul: "ye strong, despise not them that are weak."

With regret we confess that this warning is but too necessary. We are so apt to despise those who entertain *prejudices* which we have long conquered and consider foolish. We are so apt to look down with an air of superiority upon those who are behind us in theological knowledge. I fear that most of us are guilty of this sin and this folly. Remember that theology is not religion; and that those who are our *inferiors* in theological advancement may be by far our *bettors* in the sight of God, who knows our hearts! "Despise not the weak"! No! They are honest in their weakness; their prejudices are founded on sincere conviction. Believe this and you will be the happier for it. Have not we also still many prejudices and erroneous notions which we do not admit to be such, but to which our eyes will be opened in time to come?

Are their not many *articles* in our belief, many *forms* in our worship to which we cling with a fond, often superstitious attachment and with which we *will* not, *cannot* part, forms and articles which also must pass away. Do you not also feel indignant towards those who would lay rude hands on them? Are not many ready to hurl the epithet, scoffer, *materialist* at such men? Is the mildest judgment pronounced by most not this: "that they go too far?" Let us then believe that the "weak" really are sincere and earnest, and let us act accordingly.

"Despise not the weak"! No! Let us show that we are "strong"; that we are above "forms." That *we* can discern between forms and religion; and that we are

prepared to recognize *religion* even when swaddled in antiquated forms.

“Despise them !” No, but let *loving forbearance* characterize our conduct. So shall we best recommend our views to them, and by these proofs of sympathy and love win also them to *liberty, light and life*.

“Bear ye one another’s burdens.” Let us—who claim to be strong in faith—exemplify in our lives this truly Christian precept. And how can we best do it? By trying to understand the position of others ; by putting ourselves in their places ; by respecting their sincerity, though sadly misguided. So shall we fulfil the law of Christ.

But Paul also adds : “Let the weak not judge the strong.” How necessary also is this exhortation !

Surely the “strong” have much to complain of the *misrepresentations*, the *hasty judgments*, and the *summary condemnations*, and the *unbrotherly persecutions*, they suffer from the side of the “weak.” But if we have learned to know their principles we shall also understand their *actions*. These will not incite us to anger or revenge, but rather fill us with sorrow and commiseration with those poor misguided ones, and excite us to renewed zeal to convince them by word and deed of their error.

“Let them not judge the strong.” May they learn to acknowledge *honesty of purpose* also in those who differ ever so widely from them ! May they consider that the verdicts of *dishonesty and impure motives* so often hurled by them, hastily and thoughtlessly, inflict the deepest and most painful wounds in the heart of the brother who is really sincere in what he does. Who art thou that judgest another ? To God alone belongeth judgment.

To *unjust judgment* we are no strangers. Having ourselves smarted under it, let us guard against inflicting it on others. Ye strong, be strong in the spirit of Christ. Onward with *boldness* and *firmness*, but also with *forbearance* and *love* !

II.

II.

GENESIS XXVIII: 16.

“AND JACOB AWAKED OUT OF HIS SLEEP AND HE SAID, SURELY THE LORD IS IN THIS PLACE, AND I KNEW IT NOT.”

THE story of which these words form part is thoroughly Israelitic. The Israelites firmly believed in the sanctity of certain places. At these places God was thought more especially to reveal Himself to man. They were sanctuaries of God, which had to be kept holy, and whither men had to repair to worship. The story was written under the influence of this imperfect idea of God, and the nature of His revelation. Jacob was alarmed to find that he had not recognised the sacredness of the place, and that without knowing it he had spent the night on a spot which was a “House of God,” a “Gate of Heaven;” for had not God appeared to him in the dream?

There is no valid reason to believe in the historical truth of this story; it rather bears on its face the stamp of a traditionary tale, “preserved in a poetical shape.” It is an opinion more and more gaining ground among the learned, that the whole patriarchal history is mythical; that what is there related of individuals, is, to a great extent, symbolical of what was once told and believed of the history of the nation. Abraham, for instance, specially called by God to leave the land of Chaldea, and to settle in Canaan, may refer to an old tradition, extant among the people, that they originally emigrated from Mesopotamia. Abraham, about to sacrifice his son, but prevented by an angel from God, is perhaps an allusion

to the time when the Israelites offered human sacrifices like other nations, a custom which they afterwards ceased to practise.

Most legends enshrine a hidden and profound truth. Such is also the case with the story of the vision of Jacob. In order to draw benefit for our spiritual life from these traditions, we must disengage the truth from the form in which it is encased.

"Jacob," we are told, "had been guilty of a deliberate sin. He had deceived his father ; he had overreached his open hearted brother. Immediately after his transgression, when leaving his father's home, a banished man, God appears to him in a vision ; he saw a ladder reared against the sky, and angels ascending and descending on it. Fresh from his sin, God met him in tenderness and forgiveness. Jacob saw the token, which told him that all communication between Heaven and earth was not severed. The way was clear and unimpeded still. Messages of reciprocated love might pass between the Father and His sinful child, as the angels in the dream ascended and descended on the visionary ladder. The possibility of saintliness was not forfeited." All this can be learnt from the vision.

"There are Gods many, there are Lords many." This is a very true saying, when we add, "in this world of man." In reality there is but one God, but the names by which He is known, and the forms under which He is worshipped, are so different and at variance, that they represent "many Gods" rather than one God. In reality there is but one Lord, the Supreme Ruler, but the worship of men is devoted to many different objects. There are many Lords in this world whom men serve.

It is but natural that conceptions formed of God by man should differ. For all revelation is natural. By revelation we understand the knowledge which man possesses of God. In Christian theology it has been the custom to distinguish between that which is natural and

that which has been revealed. Men speak of a natural religion and a revealed religion ; of a natural knowledge of God and a revealed knowledge of God. Man can acquire the natural through his own powers, the revealed is beyond his powers, and has directly, in a supernatural manner, come from God. There are Christians, for instance, strict Lutherans, who refuse to admit that man has any natural knowledge of God whatever ; after his fall, in and through Adam, he became entirely blind ; not a spark even of divine light was left. He was like unto a stone or block of wood, as Father Luther expressed it. Others, however, acknowledge that, even after the fall, man retained some knowledge of his God, which, however, is far from sufficient for his salvation and which can never grow into perfect knowledge, and for this purpose a supernatural revelation was needed. And this has been given on two different occasions, or rather I should say at two different periods in the history of one nation, which nation is the Jews. And it is strange that Christians more than any other sect have so thoroughly hated and persecuted the Jews, from whom they received the greater part of their sacred books, without which, according to their own teaching, their sacred writings would be next to useless ; from whom they received the record of the first alleged supernatural revelation and code of morals. Verily if Jews, even of the present time, were to consult merely the history of the persecutions of their people by the Christians, they are perfectly justified in rejecting the Christian creed ; for if we must judge a tree by its fruits then the acts of those persecuting Christians do not afford proof of their being inspired by a messenger sent from God, greater than any of Israel's prophets, greater even than Moses. But let not only the dark pages of history speak ; there are also a few bright ones, and few though they be, they may not be forgotten. I need but mention tolerant Holland which was a home and a refuge to the Jews while others oppressed and persecuted them,

and that country was essentially a Christian country. And that same small Holland is also at the present day one of the foremost in showing what the spirit of Christianity really is. Holland shows that spirit—not fully yet as a nation, but it gives promise that it will do so ere long, because her great, her learned men show it—men who have been born, who have acquired learning and eminence on her soil, these are advocating most earnestly entire religious tolerance—advocating those purely Christian principles which allow and respect liberty of conscience and which recognize religion wherever there is sincerity.

The present age is more enlightened—this is perfectly certain, but let us never forget that while the wants of the age may call forth the needed men—yet the men are needed to make people in general feel the wants of the age, and to move and to lead it. And it is to Christian men of Germany and Holland in the first place, that we owe much of the tolerance of the present day. Jews ought not solely to consult and brood on the past history of their people, but also look to the present, and remember that the enlightenment and toleration of the present day is, in a large measure, owing to the principles of the Christian religion, a religion now perhaps better than ever before understood, principles now more than ever before enforced. Upon these signs of the times—as yet they are not much more than signs of the times which are coming—(only the few and the bold advocate the views to the full, but most, I think, feel them, and must soon follow)—upon these signs also Jews ought to look before spurning the prophet of Nazareth. Moses undoubtedly was great; he taught men to believe in a holy God, and consequently taught morality, but a morality which had its source in fear. Why then hesitate to call a man a greater prophet than Moses, a man who, founding his teaching on that of Moses, disclosed to us the truth that God, though most holy and just, is also a

Father to man, and who taught men to serve God, not driven by fear, but by a life of holiness founded on love. Is the ministration of love not above that of fear? Jesus did teach men that God is love, and that true worship of Him is worship in spirit and in truth.

To the Jewish nation the so-called supernatural revelation has been given, and it was given at two different periods. The first is difficult to circumscribe. To Moses God appeared amidst awful signs of His majesty; but, judging by the history of former days, which Moses is said to have written by Divine inspiration, it appears that God revealed Himself supernaturally also in the time of the patriarchs, also in the time of Adam, immediately after the fall. And this revelation continued long after Moses, for all the prophets unto Malachi are said to have been inspired. The second period commenced with Jesus, and lasted till the death of the Apostles. A part of Christendom, indeed, holds that this miraculous inspiration even now speaks, namely, in the unanimous voice of the true Apostolic Church. In these supernatural revelations we no longer believe. The nature of those alleged revelations is such that we are quite justified in rejecting the claim set up for them, and the idea itself of a revelation revealing truths essential to the salvation of man being given only to one small nation seems to us to be irreconcilable with our ideas of the justice and love which we ascribe to the Deity. We believe in a natural revelation, in one which man receives by virtue of his own inherent faculties. God is a Spirit, the Great Spirit of the Universe, and, as such, the Father of Spirits. Man is endowed with an immortal spirit. The spirit of man is akin to the spirit of God—they mingle, they touch, they feel, they comprehend each other. The Parent Spirit wills and speaks, and man's spirit may feel and understand. I say may, for God is the Perfect One, and man, even at his present highest development, is imperfect. And there are many degrees of imperfection, hence

also there are many different degrees of intensity in which men feel the presence of God's Spirit and understand His will. His Spirit pervading all reveals itself to all, but men understand imperfectly and more or less clearly, because they must read that revelation by the natural light of their spiritual enlightenment. And how manifold are the stages of advancement of the different nations and tribes! In our walks among men we may meet with the highly developed and truly religious Christian to whom every breath of Nature is the voice of God. In history we read of people, deaf to all besides, listening only to Nature's greatest sign, the sun; and the gaps between these two are filled by numerous intermediate forms. These all represent the various natural lights by which the different races of men are enabled to see the one sole revelation of God. History clearly shows that there is progress in revelation. Now this would not be the case if religion were something supernaturally revealed, for then we should expect a state of darkness in shrill contrast to one of bright light. But this is not the case. Or we should expect a gentle training up of the favoured nation to receive the revelation, while all others remained in the dark. But neither has this been the case. What are the facts of history? Almost co-equal with Moses, Zoroaster lived. The few scholars who have profoundly studied Persian theology differ as to the exact period in which he lived. According to some, he was born 3000 years, and, according to others, 1250 years before Christ. At all events, writings are preserved fully as old as the Pentateuch, and from these we can see what a high morality, not much inferior to that of Moses, was preached by one who is not supposed by Christians to have had a so-called supernatural revelation. Mosaism, compared with the teaching of Zoroaster, does not show such a difference as we should expect to exist between divine and human instruction.

Neither do these alleged revelations form any sudden transition from darkness to light, or even from a dim,

human light to a bright, divine light. On the contrary, we can detect a gradual ripening of the times, a natural progress. Man's first sense of the Deity is that of Power. Next he views it as Mind, and to this Mind he ascribes certain attributes which increase in purity according as his sense of morality is more developed. First Justice and Holiness, and last of all Love. This is the natural development of religion keeping pace with the general advancement of man. The Jews, the people who are said to have received a Divine revelation, also show this development in their conception of God. Moses, the Prophets, Jesus, represent different stages of a gradual advance. And even now this development continues, for as we grow more enlightened we form more correct ideas of God's perfection. We who have cast aside the Cerberus God have certainly made an advance on the teaching of the Church.

Men judge of God according to the amount of intellectual light they enjoy, and therefore it is natural that there should be so many different conceptions of God.

It is also perfectly natural that we find in the Jewish religion, which is a comparatively highly-developed form, though certainly not of supernatural origin, a great many erroneous views about God and His mode of revealing himself to man, as for instance, the notion of "holy places" to which our text refers. They had not grasped the idea of God's spirituality; He was represented in human form and was supposed to live in a local heaven, above the skies, whence He occasionally came down to speak with some favoured men, and generally at certain particular places, where He specially dwelt, and where men could feel his presence.

We are beyond that stage, and in answer to the question "Who is your God?" we say: God is a spirit; He is omnipresent. This we say, but do we all fully understand and feel it? The idea of the omnipresence of God is difficult to grasp; and, therefore, we still find also

among Christians the superstitious notion of certain places being more sacred than others, as being the favoured spots where God loves to dwell and to reveal himself. That one place can, more than another, bring us in a frame of mind suited to make us feel conscious of God's presence—this, of course, no one will dispute. Taught by experience we know that it is so. Yet it is a fact that some people are superstitious enough to believe that God is to be sought rather at one place than at another.

Now how can we believe this if we believe God to be omnipresent? He is a spirit, pervading all things; consequently He reveals Himself to man at all times, for whatever we see is a sign of God's life; the laws of nature are the utterances of His will. He ever speaks and is ever near; all creation is His dwelling place, and all the powers of nature are His words, for they are the expressions of His thoughts; all the events of man's life are voices from Him, for He guides and directs that life. Being ever near He also constantly reveals Himself to man, but it rests with man to give heed to Him. God is in everything and speaks through everything; yea, if there were such a being as a Devil, God would be in him. This we believe, because we believe that God is a spirit, pervading all creation, that He is omnipresent. Churchmen are, alas! so ready to hurl denunciations of pantheism and atheism at those who happen to have wider views of God's nature than they. You recollect Pope being stigmatised as an atheist; you also, perhaps, recollect his beautiful lines in which he expresses his idea of God:

“ All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body nature is, and God the soul;
That, changed through all, and yet in all the same,
Great in the earth, as in the ethereal frame;
Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
Glowes in the stars, and blossoms on the trees;
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,
Spreads undivided, operates unspent;

Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,
 As full as perfect in a hair as heart ;
 As full as perfect in vile man that mourns,
 As the rapt seraph that adores and burns ;
 To Him no high, no low, no great, no small,
 He fills, He bounds, connects, and equals all."

God is in all and in everything, but it rests with man to understand Him. Man is capable of this because he also is a spiritual being. "The Spirit of God lies touching, as it were, the soul of man, ever near and around," says a distinguished preacher. "The spirit of man mingles with the Spirit of the ever near God. In every man this is true. The spiritual in him, by which he might become a recipient of God, may be dulled, deadened, by a life of sensuality, but never lost. All men are not spiritual men, but all have spiritual sensibilities which may awake. All that is wanted is to become conscious of the nearness of God. God has placed men here to feel after him if happily they might find Him, albeit He be not far from anyone of them. Our souls float in the immeasurable ocean of spirit. God lies around us : at any moment we may be conscious of the contact."

And the *condition* upon which this revelation is granted to the spirit is a *pure heart* : "The pure in heart shall see God." This is one of the conditions of the spiritual world. The spiritual eye should be pure, then shall we see ; the heart must be clean, then shall we feel ; if obedience and love live in the soul, then also God enters into that soul, becomes visible, whispers His secret, imparts knowledge and conviction. That man shall enjoy a continuous revelation of God's Spirit to his soul, he shall walk through life as seeing Him who is invisible, each moment of his life shall be a dream of Heaven, and at all places he shall experience : Surely the Lord is here, I know it, for I feel him near.

What blessedness to live in such constant communion with God ! It inspires with a trust which expels care ; it

awakens a love which casts out fear. Therefore we should strive to be pure in heart, and so fulfil the condition, without which we can never expect to understand the revelations of God.

But we are as yet not able perfectly to fulfil the condition. Love and obedience are in no man as yet perfect, and therefore also we know and understand God but imperfectly. Though He is ever near, still there are times in which we do not know it, and other times again when we feel alarmed at the signs of His presence. Though He constantly speaks, still at times we hear Him not, and at other times we are, as it were, struck with trembling before the thunder of His voice.

When we consult our own experience, we shall find that darkness more particularly reveals God to us. This is owing to the imperfect state of our spiritual life. Whereas we should at all times feel how perfectly dependent we are upon God, a feeling which should awaken in us deep gratitude and love, and trust and resignation when circumstances are adverse, we now, while enjoying bright daylight and with the joys of the world, seem not to feel that God is near. It is only when the darkness of night comes, when trials bow us down, when we feel solitary and stand in the presence of life's great mysteries, it is then that we feel how weak we are, how much we have need of God, and that One greater than we are leads us. It is then that we seem to awake, and we say, "Surely God is near." In times of trial, disappointment, and sorrow, which cast a shadow over the soul, then it is that the light of God's presence shines brightly and that His whisperings are heard.

Why *then* more than at other times, for is God not ever near? Why? Because man then attends to God's voice, because he then longs to feel His presence, because his thoughts and wishes then ascend to One on whom he can rest, to a Father. And, happy for man, God is ever a Father, ever ready to commune with man, giving him

strength and comfort. "Behold I stand at the door and knock." This is His constant cry. If trials have brought us to open to Him the doors of our hearts, may He, when the gloom disperses and the world's joy comes again, ever remain the light and the life of our souls!

III.

III.

LUKE XII: 32.

“FEAR NOT, LITTLE FLOCK; FOR IT IS YOUR FATHER’S GOOD PLEASURE TO GIVE YOU THE KINGDOM.”

“FEAR not;” words of sweet assurance. “Oh, Divine Master, why didst Thou not tarry among men, that also we might hear Thy encouraging voice?” Thus, no doubt many a pious soul still sighs. The storms of life are so many, the winds so often grow boisterous, and black fear invades the heart, where then is the voice to assure us as it did the apostles of old: “Fear not, it is I.”

We can picture to ourselves the apostles in the storm-tossed bark, overcome with fear of the threatening danger; but their fears allayed by the assuring voice which rose above the wild roar of the sea, “Fear not!” How easily we can imagine a heavenly comfort and peace stealing over the heart of some sorely-tried or deeply-grieved sinner at hearing the words of mercy: “Son, daughter, be of good cheer.” Well can we understand what encouragement to the small circle of friends must have been inspired by the words of assurance: “Fear not, little flock.” The man who thus spoke words of comfort and assurance is no more. Jesus has long since quitted the scene of life. Is that voice then hushed in the eternal silence of death? The storms and trials of life remain the same as of old; we also are oft troubled and cry out in fear; we also are oft desponding under the burden of sin; we also oft look with evil forebodings and sadness into an unpromising future. Is there then no

Divine voice to allay our fears, to dispel our doubts, to quiet our troubles? Must they ever harass and torture us? Many turn to the words which were once spoken to men of old, and seek to derive comfort from them. Many turn to the records of the life of that great man who is said to have spoken as never man spake. Undoubtedly, the Bible has been of great comfort to thousands. Many have trodden the difficult path of life upheld by its promises. Many have passed into the dark valley of death cheered by its consolations; it has been a guide to the young and a staff to the aged, yea, a light to the departing. This is natural, for it contains words of truth and life. Men—pious and holy men—who lived in communion with God, have there written in moments of awakened religious life what they felt and experienced; their experience is that of mankind, and, therefore, their words appeal to men in after ages, because human experiences and feelings remain the same. But we need not resort to the language of those who have long since died. There is a living voice which still speaks, and it speaks to all, if men will but give ear. Often the world's tumult and cries deafen us so that we seem lost without a guide; but when in prayer we look upward to seek communion with God, a bright light dawns upon us and we hear words of guidance and of comfort. God lives and the connection between Him and man has not ceased to exist. He did not create man and leave him to himself, nor does He only occasionally reveal Himself; He is ever nigh. On our journey through life He has not left us to ourselves, but has furnished us with a guide. This guide directs us on the path of virtue and leads to communion with God. It enables us to hear the voice of God speaking to us.

It is an inestimable boon bestowed on man that God speaks to him continually.

Very rare are the instances in which the voyage of life is passed without encountering winds of adversity,

of sore trial, which cause the trembling soul to fear and the weak of faith to doubt.

Not to everyone is the measure of trial meted out in like degree: we cannot always fathom the decrees of Providence, but most men have to undergo some ordeal which sorely tries their faith.

Not at all seasons do dark clouds obscure the bright sky of joy, hope, and trust; not at all times are the storms equally threatening and the winds equally boisterous—thanks to the kind Ruler of the Universe! Man's fears are excited by manifold and various causes. At times the horizon of political life shows ominous signs which not only depress the timid but also alarm the bold; signs of devastating wars, of cruel despotism and tyranny which jeopardise our dearly-bought liberties, signs of anarchy and revolution which threaten to raze noble institutions, signs which make us tremble for freedom and for progress. Again, the approach of raging diseases of pestilence, alarming depression in commercial life with its attending increase of pauperism, oft famine and other signs of public distress.

At other times our religious institutions seem threatened. Established and cherished forms and customs are tottering, creeds and articles sanctioned by antiquity and endeared by sweet and sacred reminiscences are imperilled; the Church, with its treasure dear to us from the recollections of childhood and sanctified by the faith of departed friends, threatened by the attacks of scepticism—Religion itself in danger. The ideal in which Jesus firmly believed, and for which he died, how sadly contradicted by history does it seem! Religion, destined to unite the whole human family by one common tie as children of our Father in heaven, degenerated into the nurse of hatred and persecution! Religion—destined to awaken man's noblest feelings, to win souls for that which is true, good, and beautiful, to satisfy the keenest cravings of the heart, to sanctify the bold aspirations of the soul, gather-

ing strength from each new victory—spurned and rejected by many, who certainly are not to be numbered amongst the least noble of the sons of man, and treated with cold indifference by countless masses; while on the other hand the simple and pure religion of Jesus is rendered powerless by petrified forms, by bigotry and superstition.

Verily, these things cause many hearts to throb with anxious fear, not without reason. And then our private lives, our own religious experience! When young, we idolised that which is sublime; our hearts glowed with holy zeal; we had taken the firm resolution to fight against whatever debases man; we hoped to attain unto holiness and to shed light around us; we felt, or thought we felt, the power of a Father's, of a Saviour's love, and our young hearts rebounded with love and zeal to live a life of gratitude, to spread the blessings of God's love among our fellow-men. With enthusiasm and boldness we took up the Cross of Jesus, but also with the sincere resolve and determination to bear it to his glory.

And what has become of all this? Have the results answered those bright expectations? Oh! how sad and cruel the reality! How severe the lesson of humility! Holiness was our aim, and we have to lament ever recurring unholy thoughts and deeds. Sincere was our resolve, and we are guilty of indifference and dishonesty. The cross was our banner, truth and righteousness our watchword, and we frustrate the power of the cross by falsehood and superstition. Perfection and uniformity to Jesus was our hope, and we daily experience the force of sin and imperfection. The past truly fills us with humility and regret, and the future with fear, doubt, and anxiety. Fear of an upbraiding conscience; doubt as to the triumph of truth, righteousness, and ultimate perfection of man; anxiety as to our future.

And were the veil lifted which conceals the private life of individuals, how many trying circumstances would be

disclosed? The pitiful cry of the poor, "What shall we eat? Wherewith shall we clothe ourselves?" The harassing difficulties of those in a higher station of life; the anxious prayer at the sickbed of relative or friend; the sad parting-word of a fond mother to the son entering the great world of life; the terrible thought of death to the aged. Truly, fear and anxiety abound.

Man does indeed not pass through life without anxiety and fear! And many are they, who, like Peter on the Sea of Tiberias, sink under the weight of their fears, crying, "Lord! save me." Thanks be to God, that although the Jesus to whom Peter appealed has passed away, to us there always still is an outstretched hand, and a living, loving voice, which says: "Fear not!"

Jesus had come forward and had boldly commenced a religious teaching at variance with the existing belief of his people. He had attached to his person a small number of friends who followed and supported him. He experienced much opposition, and dangers threatened him and his flock—the future was dark. Under these circumstances he encourages his followers with the assuring words: "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's pleasure to give you the Kingdom." These words were not spoken as an empty comfort, or with the object of leading them on in order to gain their support. No; but they sprung from honest conviction. He believed, therefore he spoke. This is amply proved by his life. Only perfect confidence in the triumph of his cause could prompt a saying as this: "Heaven and earth may pass away, but my words shall not fail."

The life of Jesus ever remains to us a rich source whence lessons for our guidance can be drawn. Let us, then, see what enabled him to speak those words of encouragement and hope. We shall find that they were prompted by the same voice that still speaks to us, namely, the voice of God's Spirit in our hearts, the voice of *faith*.

Jesus has through life been obedient to the call of duty. He experienced in an eminent degree the great difficulties that beset that course. He was exposed to the sore trials to which man is subject ; to the dangers on the road to perfection ; and he triumphed, his was the victory. From him, therefore, we must learn the secret of success ; from him learn the hidden fount of strength which sustains in trouble and which secures the victory.

We also have a certain calling to fulfil. We are called to follow after perfection, and to reach it by carefully developing the gifts which God has implanted in our higher nature. We are called to exercise the noble gift of *reason* in order that we may know and understand God's revelation in the world, and that we may arrive at that which is true. We are called to stand steadfast in what has been revealed to us as truth, not only to form convictions, but to act up boldly to those sincere convictions, that is to be *honest* and *upright* in all our dealings. We are called to obey the voice of Conscience without fearing danger, or without allowing ourselves to be allured by temptations. We are called to obey and develop our intuitive *moral* sense, and so tread in the path of virtue and righteousness. We are called by our *innate religious* feelings to place implicit trust and confidence in our Maker ; to notice and acknowledge His guiding hand in the varying events of life ; to grow in the knowledge of Him as our Divine Parent ; to repose firm faith in Him for this life and for the future. We are called to wisdom, sincerity, virtue, and faith ; and since we acknowledge these qualities in Jesus of Nazareth, he becomes our example and our guide on the path, the difficult path, of duty.

How easy it is to express Duty in words, but how difficult it is to practise it ! Even Jesus—he, the Conqueror—felt the force of the difficulties ; also he had moments when temptations tried him sorely, moments when he wavered, moments when he doubted, moments

such as those when the prayer of anguish escaped His lips: "Father, if it be possible, let this pass?"

How, then, shall *we* stand? How shall *we* overcome the many obstacles which prevent our reaching perfection? How shall *we* encounter the many storms of life? How shall *we* remain firm in the midst of our many trials?

For, as we have seen, it cannot be denied that, like at all times, so also at the present, the Christian is sorely tried. Circumstances, private and public, crowd upon us, alarming us, shaking our faith; storms are brewing, filling us with dread; doubts assail us; temptation raises its siren's voice; sin follows our footsteps—no wonder if oft the anxious cry is uttered: "Lord, save me!"

A voice is at times heard "Fear not." It is the voice of levity. "Fear not," it says, enjoy life. Why be distressed by sad recollections of the past or by anxious conjectures as to the future? Why engage in strife? Why be harassed by doubts? Enjoy life and let things take their own course. Oh, the race of those who cry "Peace, peace, when there is no peace," dates from olden times. In the days of Jeremiah their voice was heard, and still the same tale is told, still men are to be found willing to believe the message and to seek comfort in that haven. Let us not deceive ourselves, nor be lulled to sleep by false hopes; above all, let us not fear the storms, nor shrink from the performance of the work to which we are called, but let us boldly face the reality, and if then also a voice assures us—like the voice of Jesus assured his friends—"Fear not," let us then inquire why we need not fear in spite of our trouble? From Jesus we shall hear but one strain: "Because it is your Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom." *Faith*, this was the secret of the greatness and success of Jesus. It was faith in God's providence which sustained him; the consciousness that he was engaged in a work of God, and that it was his Father's pleasure to give him the kingdom. Faith in his Father's love carries him through the sorest temptation and trial: "Not as I will," he says,

“but as thou wilt, Father.” Faith in God’s decree, that is in the triumph of justice and truth, supports him to the end. “It is finished,” is the exulting cry of confidence in the cause for which he had lived. Through faith he had lived, and had triumphed over the trials of this life; when the winds were strong and the waves wildly tossing he “walked over the sea.” In faith he died, and proved himself victorious over the distressing fears of the unknown future.

If there were more faith among men, more trust in God—a trust which assures that God’s ways are mercy, that it is His desire to lead man to happiness, in other words, that it is His pleasure to give the kingdom to His children, then there would be less anxiety and fear. For those things which now alarm and distress us would then be acknowledged to be the deeds of a Providence not only *wise* but also *kind*, whose dealings are inspired by wisdom and prompted by love. *True faith engenders love, and love excludes all fear.*

In times of public distress and danger the man strong in faith will be found calmly but also zealously employing means towards alleviating distress and averting danger. For, though firmly trusting in God’s providence, his faith urges him to do those things which he knows to be good. A *do-nothing* faith is no faith, it is the indifference of the fatalist.

If the state of the Church or religion alarms us, we are upheld by faith, that is, by the firm conviction that God rules the hearts and actions of men, that His ways are often different from our ways, and that where everything appears dark to us, there is light inwardly shining and working for good.

But also here our faith must be *active*. God rules every thought, but He works through human agency. We are labourers together with God. It therefore becomes us to use the gifts granted to us; to work with the light we possess towards the furtherance of truth.

If the noble institution of the Church is threatened, let us work together in faith and love to save it, by establishing it on firm and true principles which can be shaken by no wind of opposition. Let us have an eye for its failings and weak points, and take an active part in necessary reform. If deterred by superstitious reverence or fear, then we show a want of faith. Individually we seek to attain perfection. We have not reached it yet, far from it; so also should we collectively seek it. If our individual lives are still marked by great imperfection, requiring constant improvement, why should we expect to find perfection when we are united in one body like the Church? It, with all its dogmas, creeds, and articles, has certainly not descended from heaven, but is the work of imperfect men. We therefore should labour at its reform according to the measure of light which God granted us. Jesus feared not to reform the Temple with its institutions of Moses. Why should we have less faith?

If we happen to be alarmed at the advance of scepticism, and if the dangers which threaten *religion* cause us to fear, let us live a life of faith, that is, let us recommend the religion of Jesus by a life of true piety and moral purity. Then we shall most assuredly save it. If we really believe in that religion of love, then we must also prove it by our deeds and words, for our faith cannot be real if it is not proved by our lives.

And if our minds happen to be troubled by the present great revolution in theology, if we see with alarm and fear that hands, in our view unholy, are rudely grasping things sacred and dear; that cherished customs are attacked; that old and revered doctrines are pronounced untrue—also under these circumstances God's voice may be heard: "Fear not." Trust in God and in the triumph of truth; examine well each for himself, and when forced to break with old dogmas, freely do so, for you can gain nothing by holding on to that which is false. Rest assured that from every struggle God's truth will issue

clearer and stronger; and systems and doctrines must pass away, but true religion will remain while man exists. This we believe, why should we then fear?

And, my friends, what religious person does not know by experience that trust in our Heavenly Father's love is all-powerful in moments of trouble and trial! When oppressed by anxiety for self or friend, how sweet then is the assurance that our ways are in the hands of a Father in Heaven, whose care extends not merely over the short term of our earthly life, but throughout eternity! We so often allow ourselves to be cast down by the experiences of this life as if we forget that in the existence of man this is but a moment. When troubled by doubts and borne down by the consciousness of sin, how cheering then the thought that a forgiving Father cares for us!

When the bitter cup of adversity and sorrow falls to our lot, how consoling to know that we receive it from the hand of a Father whose pleasure it is that we should attain unto happiness, not the fleeting enjoyment of this world, but the perfect happiness of His Kingdom.

Whatever our lot may be in life, however trying the circumstances in which we are placed, faith in God's love is powerful to dispel every care and to dry every tear. In that faith, and *only* in that faith, are we able to walk worthy of our calling and to follow the path of duty. Truly, it is like a magic wand: it sheds a lustre on life, everything changes under its influence. But it also nerves for the *future*. If we through faith *live* honestly, that is, strictly according to the dictates of conscience, then we may confidently leave the future to God. Even over the dark valley of the shadow of death faith sheds light, for it points to a Father's house beyond. Rightly is it said:

Blest be the voice, though still and small,
That whispers God is over all.

This is the ever-living voice of God's spirit which speaks to you, to me, to all, if we would but attend to it, and not stifle its sound by a life of indifference or sin.

We must learn to mark God's presence. Some resort to the Bible, Priest, or Church for the knowledge of God, but He reveals Himself everywhere, and more particularly in our hearts. If we would carefully mark the events of our lives, however insignificant, we will be brought to recognise a Divine guidance; and if we become convinced of this fact, then we shall learn to view them in a different light to what we have done before; even trifles will speak of God's presence and care. Our faith will gradually gain in strength, and we may also rest assured that as we increase in the knowledge of God, so shall we also become more convinced that *He is love*. Then also we, like Jesus, shall fight the good fight of faith, for in every trial the encouraging voice of God, "Be of good cheer, it is I," shall be heard. If, like Jesus, we are called to some great public work which brings us in opposition to many around us, which opposition often makes us feel sore at heart; if we are engaged in a more quiet sphere, to carry out the work of our spiritual improvement, which brings us face to face with so many temptations, which often brings us to the border of despair; or if we have to battle against the vicissitudes of life, the trials of adversity—may we learn from Jesus to believe that, even as by a fixed law of God, truth must conquer, so also all things must work together for the ultimate happiness of man. Then also we shall enter into glory; for when the storms of life are past, and the calm—worse than life's storms—the calm of death awaits us, the voice shall still resound, "Fear not." Onward, then; boldly onward, on the path of duty, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

IV.

IV.

MALACHI IV : 1—3.

“FOR, BEHOLD, THE DAY COMETH, THAT SHALL BURN AS AN OVEN ;
AND ALL THE PROUD, YEA, AND ALL THAT DO WICKEDLY SHALL
BE STUBBLE : AND THE DAY THAT COMETH SHALL BURN THEM
UP, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS, THAT IT SHALL LEAVE THEM
NEITHER ROOT NOR BRANCH. BUT UNTO YOU THAT FEAR MY
NAME SHALL THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS ARISE WITH HEALING
IN HIS WINGS ; AND YE SHALL GO FORTH AND GROW UP AS
CALVES OF THE STALL. AND YE SHALL TREAD DOWN THE
WICKED ; FOR THEY SHALL BE ASHES UNDER THE SOLES OF
YOUR FEET IN THE DAY THAT I SHALL DO THIS, SAITH THE
LORD OF HOSTS.”

“AND there was war in Heaven : Michael and his angels
fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought and
his angels, and prevailed not ; neither was their place any
more found in Heaven. . . . And the devil was cast
into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the
false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night
for ever and ever.” The popular theology of the Christian
Church has adopted in its system a theory of the origin
of evil, analogous to the views expressed in the words I
have read to you out of that symbolical book—the Reve-
lation of John.

Evil is of heavenly origin ; its birthplace is heaven ;
its destination is the fire of hell.

The existence of what we term evil is evident to
man ; its origin and future have in all ages engaged the
attention of philosophers. The conflict between good
and evil is such a striking fact that men have at all
times pondered on the issue of that war,

Whatever the difference of opinion as to the cause of evil, in this men agreed that evil cannot prevail. Men always believed in the triumph of good over evil.

But what is the fate of evil after its defeat, or rather, what is the nature of its defeat? The answers may be reduced to two. One is that evil is conquered by force, held captive, punished; it is subdued, but continues to exist. The other is that evil is overcome by good, it is converted into good, it *ceases to be*. The one is: God will rule in heaven; the devil will writhe in hell. The other: God will be all in all.

On this subject I wish to make a few remarks this morning.

Men believe in the triumph of good; they therefore believe either in the *subjection* of evil, or in its *conversion*.

I need not say which of the two solutions popular theology has chosen. Its household words "Devil" and "Hell" at once give the answer. Neither is it necessary to state to which side we, "neologians," as we are sometimes styled, lean. The absence in our creed of Satan and a lake of fire sufficiently indicates it.

Popular theology appeals to its "Holy Word," and demands no further proof. In preference, words of Jesus are relied upon, however doubtful their interpretation may be.

In passing, I wish to make a remark, which in no way bears on our subject. We find, namely, that greater authority is attached by strict infallibilists to the utterances of Jesus, than to those of any of the prophets or apostles. With regard to the prophets, this is somewhat intelligible, for they are supposed to belong to an earlier and less perfect dispensation, although even in their case the explanation is not quite satisfactory. But as regards the apostles, why should the authority of Jesus be greater than their authority, or, rather, why should the words of Jesus have greater weight than those of Peter, Paul, or James? According to the infallibilists' standpoint the

writers were rendered infallible through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, consequently we can understand their speaking of a greater and lesser revelation of truth, but not of a more or less truthful one ; for every word uttered must be accepted as being true, it matters not whether Jesus or James spoke or wrote it. In case, therefore, of difference or apparent or real discrepancy, words ascribed to Jesus cannot be relied upon more than those spoken or written by any of the apostles. It is an inconsistency to make such a distinction. The infallibilists should know no higher authority than "it is written;" the authors disappear, there is but one author: God, or, as He is termed in this function, Holy Ghost.

We appeal to no scripture in support of our view ; the notions of supernatural revelation and infallible inspiration we no longer entertain. We believe in no infallible Word of God contained within the covers of a book. If we did, we might perhaps cite the Zend-Avesta, the Holy Book of the Parsees. The triumph of God is there described as being achieved by the powers of evil acknowledging the rule of Ormuzd, and willingly submitting themselves to it. The end is a universal hymn of praise.

We also believe in an ultimate annihilation of evil, for we believe good to be all-powerful, and, therefore, it can tolerate no other power antagonistic to it, which limits its sway. We believe in the perfect triumph of good, and that cannot be gained as long as a principle of evil continues to exist, though it be bound in chains. And, finally, we cannot believe that in the whole universe one single spot can be found which is set apart as the abode of God's enemies, and whence He withdraws His presence and His love. The whole universe is filled with God's spirit ; it is a holy temple to the praise and glory of His name, can we then suppose that one corner of that sacred edifice has been set apart as a place of wailing, of gnashing of teeth, and of cursing? Would that not be a stain on the work of God? God is the Father and the

Mother of His creatures. Can we then believe that at creation's morn that God of Love, even before man's existence, decided upon calling into being an enemy that never would die, an evil which would never cease to be, a bottomless pit of fire as the eternal home of beings yet to be born, a pit whence the light of his love is in all eternity excluded? Can we for a moment suppose that the Almighty Creator, whom we revere and worship as a kind, merciful, and loving Father, would have decided upon creating beings, capable of knowing and returning His love, and yet destined to be everlastingly damned, could have prepared for their reception a habitation of endless torture and punishment, and could have decided that there should be beings whom He would hate eternally?

Hate! He, the Father? Dare we ascribe such a sentiment to our God? And yet popular theology would have us do so.

Is there aught in the Universe which is not willed by His will? If there is, then He is not Almighty. Can He have willed that which is eternally evil? If He did, then He is not good. Can He love that which is evil or those who are evil? If He does, then He is not Holy. If, again, He must hate those who are evil, then He is not Love. Therefore, according to that theology, He has willed and ordained that He should hate and punish everlastingly.

Is not God the author of everything? Have not all things been ordained and decreed by Him? If not, then He would not be the Supreme, the Omniscient, and the Almighty Ruler. Thus, also, the Eternal Spirit of Evil and the Endless Fire have been willed and called into existence by Him. Is that the God we call Father?

But the Evil One, it may be said in answer, was created pure and holy, an angel of light. Pride made him rebel, and changed him into the Devil that dwelleth in Darkness. Let it be so. But surely this rebellious feeling could not

have arisen, this change could not have taken place without the foreknowledge and pre-ordination of God. He must have known and willed that it should happen.

Man also may have been created holy, righteous, and good, and may have continued in that state until the Evil One lured him to destruction. But surely also this fall from a state of righteousness into one of depravity must have formed part of God's plan.

And then "Hell." Was it laid out and its fires ready kindled when God made the heavens and the earth? Or was it formed only when the first sinner died? Or will it be prepared and opened only when the trumpet on the Last Day shall have sounded and the wicked have received their doom on the Great Day of Judgment?

It matters not which it be. In any case God, as the Designer and Maker of all things, must have willed, decreed, and made it. And if such be in reality the case, then God must cease to be in our eyes the Being perfect in Goodness.

It is wicked to abide by the creed of the popular theology on the plea that it is a mystery which we shall understand hereafter, if we at present have no sure and indisputable authority for believing that mystery. The mere word of a Church or statement of the Bible is by no means sufficient ground for belief. We must first inquire by what right the Church has drawn up her creed, and investigate closely how far the Bible is an infallible authority, on whose word we may believe things which clash with our ideas of God's goodness and love. If we shrink from this inquiry through indifference or fear, and blindly adhere to traditional doctrine, then we prove that we fear more to find the doctrines of our Church untrue than we fear to blaspheme our God and Father by believing of Him that which our natural feelings condemn.

Supposing a son has been trained by his preceptors to accept certain statements regarding his father; supposing he feels that he cannot fully believe them without thinking

badly of that father, nevertheless he does not investigate whether those statements are correct, he tries to persuade himself that it is a mystery instead of inquiring on what authority his preceptors founded their statements; and because he fears that he might find them to be wrong, he in preference lets the doubt and suspicion rest on his father. What would you say of such a son?

Sons of the Church! is the doctrine of the Church then dearer to you than the truth? It ought not to be. You cannot but find her teaching false; but, at all events, examine, before believing, whether it is true or not.

And even should your investigation lead you to break with a doctrine which in the end may prove true, I ask, would you not prefer to find that you had been mistaken with regard to Church doctrine because of your firm belief in your God's goodness and love than to find that you had remained a true son of the Church, but thereby wronged your Father by believing of Him that which degrades Him?

For my part, I have examined and found no reason to abide by the instruction of the Church; her authorities are no authorities for me; they are not my rule of faith, because I could detect no reason why they should be infallible guides. I depart from her ways because I have a firm belief in God's omnipotence and love. Therefore I fully believe that the end of man's development, as willed and decreed by God, will be a perfect triumph over evil; evil shall be no more. All men will be happy because they will be good. All Creation will join in one hymn of praise, because God shall be all in all. God's love shall shine forth in all its glory without a cloud or spot, because there is no Devil, no hell, no damned, to mar its brightness.

Good will conquer evil; this is a well nigh universal belief. In whatever form the religious sentiment may express itself, invariably we find that men believe that in the end the Good God or the Good Gods will overcome the

evil ones. This belief in the triumph of good may be said to be innate in man. And is this fact not a proof of man's greatness and goodness? Is it exaggeration to say that this innate belief is an indication that man was made to bring about that triumph, and never to become the victim of an everlasting Evil one, and an everliving monument, bearing testimony against, yea giving the lie to his innate belief, a belief which God Himself has implanted in his nature. Good must triumph, the voice of God has spoken it.

But this triumph may be achieved in different ways. Let us briefly look at the two ways I mentioned, namely, the subjection and the conversion of evil.

The words of my text are taken from a Hebrew prophet; what did the Jews believe on this point?

Before the Israelites went into captivity, the belief in a power of evil as opposed to God had evidently not arisen; it appears that the evil also was ascribed to God. On their return from Babylon their theology had been enriched with the person of Satan. So, at all events, it would appear from the writings of the Old Testament. Need I remind you of the oft quoted passages which clearly prove this. In 2 Samuel (a Book written before the captivity) xxiv: 1, we read: "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, to number Israel and Judah." The same event recorded in a Book written after the return from Babylon—1 Chron. xxi: 1, is thus described: "And *Satan* stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel."

This is significant and indicates that a decided change with regard to the idea of the origin of evil had taken place in the interval between the dates of those two books. Israel saw and believed that there was strife between good and evil. What did it think and hope of the issue?

For the greater part their speculations on the future did not extend much beyond the fate of their nation itself.

They thought that Israel would be re-established in power and glory, and rule over all its enemies. But we also find indications of a broader view. We find the idea also expressed, that though the wicked might oppress the righteous, it would be only for a time, that a day of retribution was at hand, that a great day—the day of the Lord—would come, and then shall the Lord sit in judgment to reward the righteous and to punish the unrighteous. A most terrible description of that day is given by the prophets: “Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand. The day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can abide it?” (Joel ii).

And the end would be that the righteous would triumph over their enemies, the wicked would be cast out. The greatest reward of the righteous seems in their opinion to have been the spectacle of the punishment of the wicked. “Ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet,” thus writes the prophet Malachi. Many a beautiful psalm is disfigured by some revengeful exultation at the destruction of the wicked—“Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless thou the Lord, O my soul” (Ps. civ). “The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked” (Ps. lviii: 10).

The main idea was that the righteous would inherit the earth, and the wicked be cut off. The triumph of righteousness is achieved by the overthrow and punishment of the wicked. The later Jews fixed the places, where in the life hereafter the righteous would enjoy their reward and the wicked suffer their punishment. *Paradise* was to be the abode of the blest, and *Gehenna* the habitation of the damned.

Christian theology has gone on building on this foundation. It preaches belief in an Almighty and Good God, but also in a mighty Power of Evil, Satan. There is

continual strife between these two, and apparently Satan is the more powerful; but in the end he is conquered, bound in chains, and condemned to a prison of fire; thither also are condemned all those who have served him here on earth. The servants of God enjoy peace and happiness in heaven, while they who have disobeyed God and followed Satan smart under the punishment of hell. And from that place of torture there is no escape, no return; its portals close upon the lost for all eternity, the punishment is endless.

Good has triumphed, but only through the endless punishment of evil. Such is the view of the popular theology. God reigns, but in His dominion there ever remain a number of rebellious subjects who are to be kept down by force.

Virtue has conquered, but evil has almost as great a monument of its power, an everlasting monument. The righteous are happy, but the curses and the wailings of the wicked ever sound in their ears.

Is the rule of God's love supreme?

Is the triumph of virtue complete?

Is the happiness of the righteous perfect?

Oh! no. These things cannot be as long as the devil and hell remain, for then there are always opposing powers.

Only when evil has ceased to be is it possible that God can be all in all; then virtue reigns supreme; then there is no discord in the happiness of man. Evil swallowed up in victory, that is the full triumph of virtue.

And it is only when we believe this to be the end of man's struggles that we can believe God to be the Father of man. For it is only thus that we revere His love; it is only thus that the true happiness of man is established. If we must believe otherwise, then we must cease to call God Father. What? From the very beginning He has prepared endless pains for His creatures—and yet a Father!

Then, also, immortality would be a curse, for man would be immortal only to be wretched. Then, also, heaven is a farce, for what joy can there be for the "saved" with a hell filled with the eternally lost at their feet! In a parable of Jesus, we read that the misery of the wicked miser in hell was augmented by the anxiety he felt about his brethren. Shall then the happiness of the blest not be disturbed by the bitter cries of anguish of their brethren in hell?

"If it were true (says Parker, vol. iii : 20), that one human soul was immortal, and yet was to be eternally damned, getting only more clotted with crime, and deeper bit by agony as the ages went slowly by, then immortality were a curse, not to that man only, but to all mankind, for no amount of happiness, merited or unmerited, could ever atone or make up for the horrid wrong done to that one most miserable man. Who of you is there that could relish heaven, or even bear it for a moment, knowing that a brother was doomed to smart with ever-greatening agony, while year after year, and age after age, the endless chain of eternity continued to coil round the flying wheels of hell? I say the thought of one such man would fill even heaven with misery, and the best man of men would scorn the joys of everlasting bliss, would spurn at heaven and say, 'Give me my brother's place; for me there is no heaven while he is there!' And yet it is taught that the vast majority of all mankind are thus to be condemned. Who would willingly stay in heaven on such terms? Surely not he who wept with weeping men!"

We believe that finally Virtue will exist alone, evil having ceased to be, God being all in all. Let us commence by proving in our conduct, that that which is still evil within us can be converted to good—that where the spirit of God reigns sin is conquered.

V.

V.

REVELATION XXII : 19.

“ IF ANY MAN SHALL TAKE AWAY FROM THE WORDS OF THE BOOK OF THIS PROPHECY, GOD SHALL TAKE AWAY HIS PART OUT OF THE BOOK OF LIFE, AND OUT OF THE HOLY CITY AND FROM THE THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THIS BOOK.”

THE Ark was held in such worshipful veneration by Israel, that a tradition still exists which tells how a man was once struck dead because he had ventured to put forth his hand to hold it with the intention of saving it from falling.

A similar feeling of idolatrous awe has possessed Christendom for many centuries with regard to its Bible.

No wonder. Set aside all other causes, what weak, superstitious mind can listen to a threat as the above without trembling with fear as before the voice of the awful God ! Here is a word which claims to be the final utterance of divine truth and which is charged with dire curses against all who shall, in any way, add to that book or take away from it.

And Christians have by a marvellous perversion and violation of the natural sense applied these words to the whole collection of writings which form their Bible.

In this collection the Book of Revelations is placed last by misplacement, or by accident. It is only by chance that that book closes the list.

Christians have said : God has spoken in olden times by the mouth of his servants, the prophets and the apostles, but that revelation has long since ceased, instead of saying that it will continue as long as God continues to work in man. They have said : God has spoken for

all times and His Holy Word is with us. Woe unto any one who addeth thereunto or taketh from it! Not one jot or tittle shall pass away.

This they were schooled to believe and believing this they deemed the Bible *inviolable* and above all investigation, all inquiry, for these indicate *doubt* and doubt is a most deadly sin!

Things have changed. A Roman proverb says: "The times change and we change with them." Truly said. For every thing mundane is subject to change, even that deemed most divine; and we in like measure change, oft imperceptibly to ourselves; our opinions alter even on matters thought most sacred, and it not unfrequently happens that this change has been brought about without a clear consciousness of it on our part. It is nothing unusual to hear men doubt or even deny that they ever at any former stage of their lives held different opinions to what they do at a later one.

The Bible and men's views regarding it have by no means escaped this general rule of change. It is now a very different book from what it was before. It is no longer the "same old Bible." Men deceive themselves if they still think so. Many familiar phrases have lost their meaning; oft quoted texts have no longer their old value; whole pages even have been "torn out"—as it is so elegantly expressed by some enemies to criticism. "Very much of the Bible has been dead some time. It still exists but has outlived its influence." It no longer is the mysterious oracle which men dread to touch lest they should commit sacrilege and be visited with condign punishment; it is now freely handled in order to be thoroughly understood.

The Bible question has become the great religious question of the present time. It is, for instance, deemed necessary to write extensive commentaries on it, taking notice of the results of adverse criticism. In England the Bishops are issuing their defence of the Bible in answer to

the attacks of Colenso. It is deemed necessary to revise the old versions and get improved translations, not so much because the language of the old has become too antiquated, but because it is found in many instances to be incorrect. The divines of both Holland and England are busy at the work of making new translations of the Bible.

Men debate whether the Bible should continue to be read in the schools ; either with or without note and comment. These things belong to the signs of the times, showing an entire revolution in former popular theories and notions. Matters formerly considered above all doubt are now the subject of open discussion and debate.

The work of criticism has been steadily going on since the latter part of the last century, overthrowing traditional views regarding Scripture and gradually undermining its authority. Luther had freed the christendom of the 16th century from the authority of the *Church* which had appointed itself a judge over men's minds and consciences. But it was felt that this freedom was not sufficient, that it was but a step towards that perfect liberty in which the christian ought to stand ; it was felt that the Reformation was not a completed work but that men should go on reforming. Lessing, the great German scholar of the 18th century, said : " Luther, thou hast freed us from the authority of the Pope, but who shall us deliver from the authority of the Bible ?" for it also held captive men's minds and consciences. Lessing became one of the pioneers in the great work of modern criticism. That movement in search of truth has acquired a stupendous power in the present. Its strength can no longer be quietly ignored, its voice is heard about the streets and cannot be silenced, its results and conclusions are not easily contradicted, it agitates the religious world in general. Various cries of alarm are raised, men see the Bible slipping from their hold, and consternation falls upon them.

Some seem to be filled with apprehension at the prospect of being obliged to part with an heirloom, or losing

what they have learned to look upon and cherish as a treasure and therefore cry out that their religious institutions or their Bible is in danger. But there are others, earnest, serious, pious christians who really are alarmed at the danger with which *religious life* itself is threatened; in perfect sincerity they ask the question: "what are we to rely upon if we cannot rely upon the Bible?" They fear that the foundation of their faith, of religion, will be taken away, if the authority of the Bible is denied.

This is in many respects a weighty question, because it is put sincerely. A ready and a brief answer can be given to *our* satisfaction, yet not to satisfy them for they hold that religion is intimately connected with the authority of the Bible.

Much can be adduced to show that the Bible never can, may or ought to be the foundation of our faith. This morning however I will confine myself to a few remarks which suggest themselves if we consider the matter from one particular point of view, merely to make you feel that the authority of the Bible, which is deemed indispensable to religion, is more imaginary than real, is more an idea than a reality.

The authority upon which we base our faith should be unambiguous and well defined. When it is asked: "What must we rely upon, if we cannot rely upon the Bible?" we ask: What Bible? Which parts of it? Which version? Which interpretation? For the very existence of the many opposing sects and churches, the various theories regarding the Bible, the different modes of interpretation, prove that the friends of the Bible are in no way agreed as to the extent or the manner in which it is authoritative. It is therefore no unambiguous and well defined authority which leaves no room for doubt or difference of opinion, as we should expect it to be were it really the sole foundation of true religious life.

Then also it has proved a highly uncertain and shifting foundation; its authority has been getting beautifully

less. The theories about the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible have wonderfully changed. Therefore, it no longer, as a whole, has the same authority which it had in former days. Why then should not a still further change be made and the authority be still more limited until it disappears altogether?

At each change, we may depend upon it, the alarm was equally great and men deemed that the whole structure of their faith would fall if the foundation were touched, and yet the changes were made, surely not to the detriment of true religious life! Why then should we now fear that any further change will prove so dangerous and destructive?

At each change men have asked "what must we rely on if we cannot rely on the Bible?" meaning of course *their* Bible, their theory regarding its infallibility and their interpretation of it, and *that* Bible was taken from them, and yet their religion was not lost. "But then still the Bible remained" say you. Yes, that Book remained, but what availed the mere possession of it, when its contents were constantly changing? Is it not evident that man seeks to satisfy himself with an idea more than with a reality? The idea of the authority of the Bible seems to satisfy, but surely, it is not something real on which it rests. It is an authority undefined, uncertain, changing.

We need not go back many generations to find the most strict theories of verbal inspiration and infallibility adhered to. Every word of the Bible, men said, was given by direct inspiration, the whole Book was God's most holy word. Take away one part and the whole foundation is impaired and the building erected upon it endangered! But in spite of this men did take away parts and a good many too. The Bible no longer is called the "Word of God", men now say "it contains the words of God", and they are divided as to what is God's word and what not. Historical events, says one, when recorded in the Bible must be true, for God's spirit guided the writers; no, says

another, the historical part is human, only the doctrinal part is divine, the "facts" you may assail, provided you leave the "ideas and teaching" intact! And also on the "teaching" men are divided, in how far it must be taken literally or read as having a "deeper" meaning.

Men even hesitate to affirm that the teaching of every part of the Bible is moral, according to the standard of our time. It is not denied that portions of the Bible shock the intellect and the moral sense, if they are to be taken to be literally true; they are libels upon God.

See what changes are introduced, see what concessions are made, see how the "old Bible" is thereby being contradicted and its authority undermined, and that too by its very defenders, the men of the Church. "Bible-revision Committees" are appointed to publish new and *improved* versions of the Bible; School Boards find the Bible a stumbling block in the way of National Education and so discuss whether the Bible shall continue as a textbook in the schools, and if so, whether it shall be taught with or without "notes and comment"; commentators, chosen from among the learned and high dignitaries of the Church, in their defence of the Bible make marvellous concessions, sufficient to overthrow in time its entire authority. I allude to the most important concession made by one of the writers in the Bible commentary now being issued by the Bishops of the English Church. As you know the Commentary owes its origin to Colenso's publications on the Pentateuch; it must indirectly serve as a refutation of these. Colenso had, amongst others, drawn the attention to the discrepancy existing between the two versions of the ten commandments as found in Exod. xx and Deut. v, and had concluded from this discrepancy, which amounts to a contradiction, that the same author had not written both, much less could the Divine Spirit have given them by inspiration. The commentator in dealing with this question does not resort to the subterfuges of the harmonists, but honestly meets the question and is forced to ad-

mit that both versions could not have been written by Moses ; that both could not have been engraved upon the tablets of stone ; he adopts an explanation given by a German scholar, who says that originally there existed merely the "ten words", that is, each commandment very briefly expressed like the 6th, 7th and 8th, and that afterwards, either Moses or others, gave them their present form. This concession is made in spite of the words by which the commandments in both places are introduced : "and *these* words spake the Lord". What becomes after such a concession of the infallibility and of the authority of the Bible !

These changes are introduced ; these concessions are made to a hostile criticism. Biblical authority is thus weakened and narrowed and yet religion does not suffer. The very teachers of religion carry on this work in spite of the cries of alarm which the simple and weak-minded raise. Why then should we stop if further change is made necessary ? Why fear a further undermining of authority, which proves to be untenable ? Why should the cry raised to-day against us be less a cry of false alarm than all the former ones at each period of change ?

Why have the changes and concessions not proved dangerous to religion ? Because they were made in the furtherance and interest of truth. Let us never forget this, the Truth must always confer benefit. Let us therefore zealously seek after truth, ever asking for "more light," and always follow whithersoever it leads. Religion is the highest truth as viewed by the soul, how then can truth as revealed to the intellect ever prove destructive of the soul's treasure !

"Yet many have argued, that the Bible, with all its deficiencies, ought for ever to be maintained in authority because it offers great consolation to the less strong minded." This is an opinion, which "leads to the obnoxious distinction between a creed for philosophers and a creed for the vulgar mass ; as if that which is illusion and false-

hood for the former, could be truth and light for the latter ! A belief which does not satisfy the most acute inquirer can by honest men never be deemed wholly sufficient for the simple-minded." We should not act according to that immoral Jesuitical rule : "The end justifies the means." Dare the learned, the privileged, say : truth for myself, with falsehood I feed the simple ? I walk in light, let the simple grope in darkness ? "No man lighteth a candle and putteth it under a bushel but on a candlestick, in order that its light may shine on all."

This consideration ought finally to decide all questions such as the one about the authority of the Bible. If after careful and earnest inquiry the truth proves to be that the Bible cannot and should not be the infallible ground of our faith, let us then freely accept that truth, it can never harm our faith. We should rather rejoice that we have awakened to the danger of having built on a wrong and unsafe foundation.

To this conclusion we are led by the results of honest inquiry. With the light thus shed abroad we are forced to admit the truth, that the Bible as an infallible authority has fulfilled its mission, that as a foundation of faith it ought no more to be relied upon. To the Bible and to men's theories about its Inspiration and Infallibility are also applicable the words of the poet :—

" Our little systems have their day,
They have their day and cease to be ;
They are but broken lights from Thee,
And thou, O Lord, art more than they ! "

Yes, our God is more than all our systems, and He still speaks unto man, in His mighty works around, by the voice of His Spirit in man's soul. Let us then rely upon that voice ! What surer foundation can we want ? It is founded upon the soul's consciousness of communion with God. "Not obedience to doctrines imposed by extraneous commands must be the rule of our actions, but obedience to our reason and our conscience. Not a number of books

traditionally handed down, and singled out by fallible judgment from a vast multitude of works, is the true source of religion, but the spirit which thirsts after truth, and the heart which yearns for love; the Word of God was not merely heard during a limited period of human history; it has not been mute for thousands of years; it was proclaimed at all times when intelligence and moral excellence uttered their thoughts and aspirations; and it will be heard as long as the instinct to great and noble deeds lives in mankind." This is a safe foundation, for "where the law is engraven on the tablets of the heart, it cannot be destroyed, it is living and working and blossoms forth incessantly in deeds of charity and goodwill."

VI.

VI.

MATTH. XXVIII: 5, 6.

“AND THE ANGEL ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO THE WOMEN,
FEAR YE NOT: FOR I KNOW THAT YE SEEK JESUS, WHICH
WAS CRUCIFIED. HE IS NOT HERE; FOR HE IS RISEN, AS
HE SAID.”

“WHAT man is he that liveth and shall not see death?” Men dispute not the universal rule of death. It is an admitted fact. All feel and know that die they must; it may be soon, it may be late, but once the hour must strike in which man must “yield up the ghost.” This all know to be true. No one imagines for a moment that he will form an exception to this law of dying, that he will escape the cold sleep of death and continue to live. “It is appointed unto men once to die,” such is the doom passed on mankind; and death is too frequent a visitor at our doors than that we should doubt its power; its messengers too constantly hover about the abodes of men than that we should be ignorant of its purposes and its away. Men may seek to drown thoughts of death, or even to forget it amidst the activity of vigorous life, but no one ever thinks of denying that also for him an hour will strike in which he shall cease to be numbered among the living. Justly, therefore may the psalmist ask, “what man liveth that shall not see death? who shall free his life from the grave?”

Because death is so general and frequent, men at times speak of it somewhat lightly, but in truth “it is no mark of courage to speak lightly of human dying; no man who thinks can call it a trifling thing to die, and it is a mockery to speak lightly of that which we cannot know until it comes”.

At times also men appear to become so familiar with the signs of death as to cease being affected thereby, but methinks that such is rarely the case in reality; the icy touch of the dead will invariably send a thrill through the frame, and the opened grave call up feelings of awe, for they speak of the end of earthly existence.

Why is it such a solemn thing, to die? Why does man fear death? For various reasons. In the first place, because we look upon death as the parting with all here below on which the heart has set its affections. Then, with death is associated that sensation of loneliness, which we dread. We die alone, no friend accompanies us on that dark, mysterious journey; and the conviction that that journey is a dark mysterious one, is another pang. We know not where we are to go, what we are to meet. But there is yet another cause: it is the thought that with death we cease to be. "Everything that lives," says a writer, "cleaves to its own existence. That unutterable thing which we call our Being, the parting with it, is agony. It is the first and intensest desire of living things, to be. Enjoyment, blessedness, everything we long for is wrapped up in being. Darkness and all that the spirit recoils from is contained in this idea, not to be." With this intense passion for being, the idea of death clashes. We see that death is the end of life—such as we know it. Verily, the boldest heart may be excused if it shudders especially when the idea forces itself upon it, that existence ceases, perhaps, for ever. We may indeed fear the messenger of death because it comes shrouded in mystery summoning us to go hence and be no more!

But must man succumb to this fear? Is it all impenetrable darkness beyond the grave? Is there no power which enables man to triumph over death and its terrors? Is there no response to the cry of anguish: "if a man die shall he live again?"

It is not all darkness, no! there are lights at the grave. There are angels of light at the sepulchre with words of

comfort. There is a power which gives us the victory over death. There is a voice which assures us that the death of the body is not the end of life, but only a transition from one form of existence to another ; that the grave is not the final abode of man, but the portal to another world where life and love are eternal ; a voice which tells us that to be overcome by fear of death is cowardly, for it is only a putting off of corruption and a putting on of incorruption. This light on the tomb is the glorious hope of immortality.

Our thoughts involuntarily take this direction on this day, Easter Sunday, the festival of immortal life. The question has been asked of us : Whence do you derive your hope of a life hereafter ? On what do you build your hope, and how can you speak with such assurance ? This festival offers sufficient support to the faith of the majority of Christians ; it commemorates the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and that is to them the guarantee of their immortality, but what certainty have you ? ”

It is true we do not share the belief commonly held regarding the resurrection of Jesus and yet our hope is no less well founded.

It is true we have broken with the traditions of the church. Our view of Easter is a very different one to that of our orthodox brethren. We consider much of what they tell of it to be fiction, the product of superstition, not facts ; mythology and not history. We can no longer place implicit credence in the Gospel narratives, both because of the discrepancies in those accounts, and also because the Bible has ceased to be an infallible authority for us. On anything there related, therefore, we do not and cannot found our faith or our hope.

But even if the Easter-story of the bodily resurrection of Jesus be true, how can that fact be a proof of our immortality ? If Jesus, a divine being, was miraculously raised from death, what assurance can that give us that we, human beings, shall also arise from the dead ? If Jesus

arose bodily, how can that be a proof to us that our spirits are immortal?

On such supports our hope is not founded, and in spite of our unbelief, we firmly believe that Jesus lives and that also we shall live. "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed."

Our belief is not founded on any outward authority; we take it not on trust from book, church or priest, but from God himself who has engraved it on the tablets of our hearts. The belief in man's immortality did not come to mankind by any "miraculous revelation." It comes by intuition; it is an instinctive belief in the same way as belief in God, in the love of man, in the sentiment of justice—a belief which comes unavoidably from the nature of man.

A good God has thus framed our nature and thereby proved his great love. We sink not into atheism when outward supports fall, for an ever-living voice within speaks. No, the good God—the Parent of man—has not left his child to be a victim to the torments of fear or the agonies of despair. He has not wrapped man's future in utter darkness. He does not disappear at the brink of the grave. He does not bid us farewell at the threshold of the region of death. No, at all times He has sent and does still send His messengers to man, angels of light, who sit at the portals of the tomb cheering the timid and comforting the weeping, telling them that the cold and dismal grave is not the final resting place of man, and that they who are deemed dead have arisen into a more glorious life.

Who or what are they, these angels at the sepulchre?

My Friends, I do not feel inclined on the present occasion to enter into cold argumentation in proof of immortality. I wish merely to say a few simple and cheering words, while I direct your attention to the "lights" which for us illumine the darkness of death, by giving us the assurance that there is a life beyond the grave.

Lights on the tomb! Have we need of such? and are there such?

O, anyone who has ever seriously meditated upon death, upon his or her own death, upon what and whom he or she must part with when the eye closes on this world; or who has thought of the death of some one dearly beloved, how great the loss, when the loved one is no more!—O, anyone who has ever felt how cruel the blows of death can be, must have felt the need of, must have cried out for “light.” And think you that cry could have been in vain? No, I cannot believe it.

“There are times,” says Parker, “when we think little of a future life. In a period of success, serene and healthy life, the day’s good is good enough for that day. But there comes a time when this day’s good is not enough; its ill too great to bear. When death comes down and wrenches off a friend from our side; wife, child, brother, father, a dear one taken; this life is not enough, O no, not to the coldest, coarsest, and most sensual man. When you lay down in the earth your mother, sister, wife or child, remembering that you shall see their face no more, is life enough? Do you not reach out your arms for heaven, for immortality?” And I ask is there in such a case no answer to the petition? Is there no angel to roll away the stone from the door of the sepulchre and to speak of a life hereafter? Is it possible for you to part from those you have learned to love, perfectly indifferent whether the feeling of love will outlast the body or whether it dies in death? I cannot believe it. Does nature not prompt you to long, yea to pray for an eternity where true love is eternal? And I ask is there no response to that prayer, no angel?

Is it possible for you to think of the last fond look, the last cold icy touch, the dying whisper of one dearly beloved. Can you stand by and see those dear remains committed to the dust, without wishing, longing, hoping, yea praying, O, so fervently, that the beloved one be not

dead? O no; and I ask, is there no response? Is there no angel hovering about that death-bed or that grave, who says that life and love are eternal?

Yes undoubtedly man does long for those angel voices and, thanks be to God! there are such angels, there are lights on the tomb!

Who and what are they?

My Friends, at the sepulchre sits the angel of *Faith*. It says: The Almighty God is your Father; your happiness is His pleasure and His care, fear not therefore at the sight of death; the dead rise again.

There at the sepulchre watches also the angel of *Hope*. It says: the innate longing of the soul after immortality will not be disappointed, for it is your Father who is the Framer and Ruler of all things. Do not shudder therefore at the destruction of the body, for the dead rise again.

There also sits the angel of *Love*. It says: love strong and holy cannot die, for God is a Father of love; fear not then, for the dead rise again, life and love are eternal.

Yes, *Faith* is a light on the tomb. Faith in God's love. We believe Him to be all-powerful, all-wise and all-good; therefore He must wish the best of all possible things for man; must know the best of all possible things, and consequently also bring to pass what He wishes. Man's happiness is not complete if there is no life beyond the present. This God must know and consequently wish and will that man should live beyond the span of his earthly existence and also bring it to pass. We therefore believe that man is immortal because we believe that the Almighty God is love. Thus faith becomes a light which chases away the shadows of death. Illumined by it we can securely lie down to sleep the sleep of death for we know that we shall awake in the arms of Eternal Love; and when dear ones are taken away from us that the angel whispers, "it is well with them, they have gone unto the Father."

Yes, *Hope* is a light on the tomb. We feel immortality as a desire, it is implanted in our nature; and we believe

that what is thus in us, is there written by God. He cannot deceive, He cannot lie, therefore there must be a "corresponding gratification for that universal desire." Our nature bids us hope; God has framed that nature and has there planted that hope; He cannot deceive his child; man must be immortal! The star of hope shines on the grave; its light cannot be a false light, O no, it is a kind messenger from God which speaks to man of a future life.

And that other angel, my Friends, have you never yet heard its sweet whisperings, the angel of *Love*? Verily, that is a bright light on the tomb! Who that has at any time been laid low, mourning the death of one tenderly loved, has not felt the comforting conviction grow upon him that love is more powerful than death, that ties so tender and feelings so deep and holy cannot be broken by the death of the body?

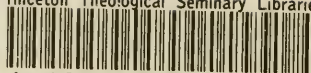
As regards myself, I fully believe that love to God and love for dear ones on earth as pure as our love to God, cannot die. Shall the noblest feeling of our spiritual nature cease to exist with the death of the body? I cannot believe it. The assurance of love is a light from God, an angel sent to tell us that they whom we seek are not among the dead, but have arisen and gone to the Father, whither we shall follow them.

Great are the trials into which we are brought by death. Grief may bring us to the verge of despair, but by faith, hope, and love we shall conquer.

"*Love* being divine is eternal. Though the turf be laid damp and heavy over the beloved head, our tears shall fall like the blessed rain from heaven and water the very barrenness of the grave, till at length the flowers of *Hope* begin to spring and *Faith* tells us they shall bloom hereafter in another and a better world."



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